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C O N F I D E N T I A L HARARE 002055

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AF/S FOR B. NEULING
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE, D. TEITELBAUM
PARIS FOR C. NEARY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2009
TAGS: PGOV PHUM ZI MDC
SUBJECT: MDC AWAITS NEW PARLIAMENTARY BOUNDARIES

REF: HARARE 2049

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher W. Dell under Section 1.4 b/d

¶1. (U) On December 15, Minister of Justice Patrick Chinamasa announced that the Delimitation Commission, which establishes new boundaries for parliamentary constituencies, had completed its work in preparation for the March elections and would soon be presenting its report to President Mugabe. Chinamasa, however, gave no timetable on when the Commission would make its work public. The boundaries set by the Commission are reportedly based on the voter rolls as of October 2004.

¶2. (C) The MDC, which had no one on the Commission, has been very concerned about the potential for gerrymandering and fraud in this process (reftel). On December 17, MDC MP for Harare North Trudy Stevenson told Poloff that the MDC was anxious to see the results of the Commission's work. The MDC has tentatively chosen candidates in the event that the party decides to participate in the parliamentary elections; however, Stevenson said candidates cannot officially be nominated until the constituencies are determined. Stevenson added that the MDC was somewhat concerned by unofficial reports they had received of the Commission's results. According to these reports, two Harare constituencies, Mbare West and Mbare East, will be combined, ostensibly due to a decrease in Harare's population. Stevenson doubted the purported basis for the consolidation of the seat and said it was an example of the Government reducing the number of urban constituencies, where the MDC was strongest, in favor of rural areas, where ZANU-PF traditionally had stronger support.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: Delimitation, along with the registration process, which is due to be completed in late January, are potentially important factors in the GOZ's efforts to ensure a victory in the March elections, while avoiding outright fraud at the polls. It remains to be seen whether the Commission's work has exceeded the bounds of district redrawing permitted by the constitution and, if so, whether there is anything the MDC can do about it. The Commission's absence of MDC representation appears to be objectionable under Article 7.3 of the SADC Principles and Guidelines on Elections, which provides that electoral bodies must be "impartial, all-inclusive, competent and accountable."

DELL